

Yearlong spaceman plunges into pool: 'Man, that feels good'

March 3 2016, by Marcia Dunn



Expedition 46 Commander Scott Kelly of NASA smiles upon arriving at Ellington Field, Thursday, March 3, 2016 in Houston, Texas, after his return to Earth. The Soyuz TMA-18M spacecraft landed near the town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, on Wednesday with Kelly and Russian cosmonauts Mikhail Kornienko and Sergey Volkov of Roscosmos. Kelly and Kornienko are completing an International Space Station record year-long mission to collect valuable data on the effect of long duration weightlessness on the human body

that will be used to formulate a human mission to Mars. Volkov is returning after six months on the station. (Joel Kowsky/NASA via AP)

NASA's yearlong spaceman Scott Kelly took a long-anticipated plunge Thursday, jumping into his backyard pool, astronaut outfit and all.

"Oh, man, that feels good," Kelly said as he floated to the surface.

After nearly a year of space sponge baths, Kelly didn't even take time to change out of his blue flight suit. He walked right up to the edge of the pool, tilted sideways and fell in. It was still dark outside early Thursday morning in Houston—he'd been yearning for this moment throughout his U.S.- record setting mission.

A video of his plunge was posted to his Twitter account Thursday, a day after his return from the International Space Station.

"There's no place like home," he tweeted.

Kelly—looking and acting remarkably hearty after 340 days in space—was reunited with his family earlier in the morning in Houston after a flight from Kazakhstan, where his mission ended.

Kelly's girlfriend, Johnson Space Center public affairs representative Amiko Kauderer, and his two daughters, ages 20 and 12, rushed into his arms after he exited the NASA jet. His identical twin, retired astronaut Mark Kelly, and their father were next to greet him. Also welcoming him home: Mark's wife, former Arizona congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords.



Expedition 46 Commander Scott Kelly of NASA delivers remarks upon arriving at Ellington Field, Thursday, March 3, 2016 in Houston, Texas, after his return to Earth. The Soyuz TMA-18M spacecraft landed near the town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, on Wednesday with Kelly and Russian cosmonauts Mikhail Kornienko and Sergey Volkov of Roscosmos. Kelly and Kornienko are completing an International Space Station record year-long mission to collect valuable data on the effect of long duration weightlessness on the human body that will be used to formulate a human mission to Mars. Volkov is returning after six months on the station. (Joel Kowsky/NASA via AP)

This last leg of his journey, by plane, took a whole day because of weather delays. So it was in the wee hours—27 hours after returning to Earth in a Russian Soyuz capsule—when Kelly finally got to Houston's Ellington Airport near Johnson Space Center.

"I'm used to going 17,500 mph, but this airplane doesn't do quite that,"

Kelly joked at a brief welcoming ceremony attended by Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden.

She brought him a gift of beer from President Barack Obama and some apple pie. "Nothing's more American than that!" she said.



ADDS IDENTITY OF INDIVIDUALS IN PHOTO - In this photo provided by NASA, astronaut Scott Kelly's girlfriend NASA public affairs representative Amiko Kauderer, center, along with Kelly's daughters Samantha, left and Charlotte, right, wave American flags as the plane carrying Expedition 46 Commander Kelly of NASA taxis upon landing at Ellington Field, Thursday, March 3, 2016, in Houston, after his return to Earth. The Soyuz TMA-18M spacecraft landed near the town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, on Wednesday with Kelly and Russian cosmonauts Mikhail Kornienko and Sergey Volkov of Roscosmos. Kelly and Kornienko completed an International Space Station record year-long mission to collect valuable data on the effect of long duration weightlessness on the human body that will be used to formulate a human mission to Mars. Volkov is returning after six months on the station. (Joel Kowsky/NASA via AP)

Kelly noted that when he left Houston in February last year, he was still 50. Now he's 52, thanks to his Feb. 21st birthday.

"It was a very long trip," he said. "But it feels great. It's great to be back in Texas on U.S. soil."

Before he could go home to his own bed—and his own pool—Kelly had to detour to Johnson to endure more medical tests to measure his body's adaptation to gravity. The main reason for the long trip—double the usual station stint—was so NASA could gather data that will keep future Mars explorers healthy and happy during the 2½-year expeditions planned for the 2030s and beyond. His brother took part in many of the studies as a ground control and unprecedented genetic double.



Expedition 46 Commander Scott Kelly of NASA, left, is greeted by Jill Biden, wife of U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, after arriving at Ellington Field, Thursday, March 3, 2016 in Houston, Texas, after his return to Earth. The Soyuz TMA-18M spacecraft landed near the town of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, on Wednesday with Kelly and Russian cosmonauts Mikhail Kornienko and Sergey Volkov of Roscosmos. Kelly and Kornienko are completing an International Space Station record year-long mission to collect valuable data on the effect of long duration weightlessness on the human body that will be used to formulate a human mission to Mars. Volkov is returning after six months on the station. (Joel Kowsky/NASA via AP)

The Russian cosmonaut with whom Kelly spent the year in space—Mikhail Kornienko—is undergoing his own medical checkups back home in Star City, Russia. The Russians hold the world record for days in space—438—set back in the mid-1990s at the former Mir space station.

Next up for Kelly: a news conference at Johnson on Friday and a continuing series of tests, expected to last for months and possibly a year.

Ditto for his brother.

"After 340 days off the planet and 5,400 times around it," Mark proudly tweeted, "it's good to have you home, @StationCDRKelly."

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